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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000042

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SUBJECT: DOHA'S GAZA SUMMIT -- QATAR LURCHES TOWARD THE RADICAL CAMP

Classified By: Classified by: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(C) Key Points and Comments

-- Having failed to achieve a quorum to hold an emergency Arab League summit, Qatar went ahead anyway with what it could get: an international gathering that included hardliners, rejectionists, and terrorist groups. Qatar started out seeking broad Arab League participation and consensus. It ended up with primarily, but not/not exclusively, representatives from the radical Islamic camp.

-- Clearly, the Doha emergency summit on January 16 was not a bid to find a unified Arab position on Israel's offensive in Gaza. In one sense, the truncated summit was an expression of Qatari emotion, ego and ideology. Qatar's leadership is deeply angry over the Israeli offensive, and it has true compassion for the associated civilian suffering.

-- Qatar's leadership also has the growing confidence that, if necessary, it has the skills, tools, resources, and influence to lead an effective Arab response to the Gaza fighting. And, in positioning itself to lead such a response, Qatar believes it will both advance its standing in Arab public opinion and be seen as a champion of it.

-- Both are important to Qatar's government, since it wants to protect itself from the heavy criticism other Arab governments are taking from the Arab street for the perceived inaction and fecklessness.

-- If there was a silver lining to the summit, it is this: there was very little focus on the United States or criticism of it, even though Iranian President Ahmedinejad and other radical hardliners implacably opposed to U.S. policies in the region were there.

-- That said, Qatar's actions at the summit, including announcing its decision to close the Israeli Trade Office, expel Israeli diplomats, and freeze ties with Israel after 12 years, provide further evidence that the Qatari leadership is careening towards the radical camp. We must proceed carefully with Qatar's leadership in nudging Qatar back to a policy of broad regional engagement and mediation that brings it much closer to us.

-- Embassy Doha presents in septel a gameplan through February to help accomplish that.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (C) Besides the host, Qatar's Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, six Arab League heads of state attended:

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad,
Lebanese President Michel Suleiman,

Sudanese President Omar Hasan al-Bashir,
Algerian President Abdel Aziz Bouteflika,
Mauritanian coup leader, General Mohamed Ould Abdul Aziz,
Comoros President Ahmed Abdullah Sambi.

¶2. (U) In all, the Doha meeting assembled representatives of 13 of the Arab League's 22 members, including Iraq's Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi. Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Senegalese President Wad were there. Turkey also took part, with Ankara sending an aide to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, according to one press report.

¶3. (C) The official attendees included the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a U.S.-listed terrorist group; and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a group officially designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the EU, the UK, Japan, and others. Hamas Politburo Chief Khalid Mishal was given a prominent role.

¶4. (C) Iran, Nigeria, and others were invited to come at the last minute, and they did, headlined by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas stayed away from the conference. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and several other Arab countries, including Qatar's fellow GCC members, boycotted the conference.

¶5. (C) The resident diplomatic corps, including the U.S. Ambassador, was invited to attend the opening ceremony at the iconic Sheraton Hotel, where Qatar hosted in 1982 the first GCC Summit. Given the USG's opposition to the emergency Doha summit on Gaza, Ambassador declined to attend.

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¶6. (C) The final communique, issued at the end of the day-long conference, was in the name of only the attending Arab states, including Iraq. Among the more significant points of the communique:

¶A. The intent to pursue criminal prosecution of "Israel and its officials" through international and national courts for committing "aggression, war crimes and genocide" in Gaza and to seek compensation for those acts in civil suits.

Note 1: Doha already is organizing a follow-on international conference on Israeli "war crimes." It was announced January 17 that The Arab Democracy Foundation in Qatar and Qatar's National Committee for Human Rights will host a two-day international conference February 20-21 "to mobilize the world community against the war crimes being committed by Israel." Organizers claim 120 Arab and international legal experts, journalists, and activists from various non-governmental organizations are likely to attend.

Note 2: The February 20 conference is scheduled to occur immediately after the U.S.-Islamic World Forum, an annual gathering that, at least in the past, has attracted some of our most prominent Americans to Doha.

Note 3: The Organization of the Islamic Conference may soon hold a conference of its own on Israeli actions in Gaza. The summit communique welcomed the call at the conference by Senegalese President Wad, the OIC President, to convene an OIC Emergency Summit to consider "the brutal Israeli aggression" against Gaza. End notes.

¶B. The agreement to establish a reconstruction fund for Gaza.

Note: Qatar has already promised \$250 million for the fund. Importantly, Qatar has not described the mechanism it will use for channeling that aid to Gaza. It is quite possible that Qatar will bypass the Palestinian Authority altogether, just as it bypassed the Lebanese central government when Qatar provided relief to southern Lebanon following the 2006 war there. End note.

¶C. The call upon the Palestinian parties to reach consensus and achieve Palestinian national reconciliation.

Note: This appeal could be an opening for Qatar to help mediate between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Please see discussion below in paras. 8-14 on Qatar's role in the region: that of a regional leader or that of a regional mediator. End note.

¶D. The call to suspend the Arab Peace Initiative that was adopted at the Arab Summit held in Beirut in 2002, and to cease all forms of normalization with Israel, including the reconsideration of diplomatic and economic relations.

Note: Qatar and Mauritania had already moved to freeze their relations with Israel, and the communique commended the two for that. Roi Rosenblit, the head of Israel's Trade Office in Doha, called Ambassador January 18 to say that he had just been told by the MFA that he had one week to close the office and leave the country. Rosenblit asked for Embassy Doha's help in closing down the Trade Office, and Ambassador agreed to supply it. End note.

¶7. (C) In his speech at the conference, Ahmadinejad issued seven demands. They included immediate termination of Israeli attacks over the Gaza Strip, closure of Israel's missions and trade offices in Arab and Islamic countries, and an economic boycott of Israeli goods. Ahmadinejad criticized the UN Security Council as just a tool for the United States and Britain during the 2006 war in Lebanon and now in Gaza. But his references to the United States were actually quite few.

POLICY DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

¶8. (C) Doha's Gaza summit represents more evidence of a recent turn by Qatar from a focus on broad regional engagement and mediation to a drive for a regional leadership role. Qatar once prided itself on having relationships across the ideological spectrum in the larger Middle East. Now it is freezing relations with Israel, expelling Israeli diplomats, and closing Israel's Trade Office after 12 years. Qatar's ties are fraying badly (once again) with Egypt and Saudi Arabia

¶9. (C) With these steps, Qatar has taken actions that undermine -- contradict, actually -- its broad engagement

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strategy in the region and elsewhere. That will hurt Qatar's Darfur Initiative, which needs Egypt's support, if it is to succeed.

¶10. (C) More broadly, Qatar's drive for a regional leadership role will make it more difficult for Qatar to be an effective regional mediator. States with sufficient strategic weight can both lead and mediate, of course. But Qatar lacks that strategic weight. In Qatar's drive to lead, it alienates the very parties it needs in order to be an effective mediator. In short, Qatar's desire to lead will be at the expense of its more attainable, worthwhile role as a mediator in the region.

¶11. (C) Moreover, the relatively small number of states and organizations that accept Qatar's leadership is routinely opposed to USG policies in the region, often violently so. Thus, the more that Qatar focuses on leadership, the more likely Qatar and the USG will find themselves at odds.

¶12. (C) In a way, Qatar also is getting drawn in by the radical camp. Qatar sees its wealth in part as a ticket to big-time diplomacy. And various parties in the region, and even further afield, want to exploit -- even pander to -- Qatar's diplomatic ambitions in order to tap into Qatar's

money.

¶13. (C) To build on an observation by NYT columnist David Brooks in a recent op-ed about human nature and behavioral economics, the USG needs to keep in mind that a complex combination of emotion, ego, strategy, ideology, religion, habit, memory, and principle is involved in much of Al Thani thinking, and in many Al Thani decisions, about Gaza, Hamas, and the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

¶14. (C) To counter this set of conditions diplomatically, the USG will need to encourage the Amir to focus his energy, strategies and policies on a return to broad regional engagement and mediation, where the common ground between Qatar and the United States is greater and can be expanded still further. Please see septel for Embassy Doha's recommendations on what immediate steps the USG can take towards that end.

LeBaron